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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [MASS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSO-BELARUSIAN POLITICAL-MILITARY RELATIONS
CLOSE, BUT NOT TOO CLOSE

REF: A. 07 MOSCOW 5154
[1](#)B. 07 MOSCOW 5828

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice G. Wells for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an April 30 visit to Belarus, Minister of Defense (MOD) Anatoliy Serdyukov met with MOD Leonid Maltsev and proclaimed that close ties between the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) members were more important than ever before because of the threat posed by NATO enlargement, the establishment of U.S. missile defense (MD) systems in the Czech Republic and Poland, and "the aggravation of the situation in the Middle East." Russian MFA sources told us that the GOR was focused on seeking stability in Minsk. The centerpiece of the political-military relationship remains the integrated air defense system (IADS) between the two countries. In dollar terms, Belarus is a small market for Russian military hardware, but Minsk is currently seeking to acquire two battalions of advanced S-400 (SA-21) air defense missile systems by 2010. Belarus's constitution prevents its military from taking part in military actions outside Belarus, limiting its commitment to the CSTO. Medvedev's inauguration is unlikely to alter Russia's strategic relationship with Belarus or lead to any diminution in friction with Lukashenko, which keeps the official relationship close but cold. End Summary.

Serdyukov Visits Minsk, Warns of Enemy At the Gates

[1](#)2. (U) MinDef Serdyukov used his regularly scheduled, semi-annual meeting with his Belarusian counterpart in Minsk on April 30 to discuss ways to improve military cooperation in the face of perceived threats from NATO and the Middle East. Decrying NATO enlargement and plans to install MD systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, Serdyukov said pooling resources with Belarus was necessary to "neutralize aggressive threats." He said it would also help further integrate the two countries into the long-planned union state. Belarusian MOD Leonid Matsev expressed enthusiasm for cooperating with Russia both bilaterally and within the framework of the CSTO.

[1](#)3. (U) During Serdyukov's visit, two new Russo-Belarusian joint military planning board members were added: retired Russian Air Force Marshall Aleksandr Yefimov, Chair of the Committee of the All-Russian Public Organization of War Veterans and Military Service, and the Chair of the Belarusian Union of Officers, retired Lieutenant General Yevgeny Mukulchik. Russia and Belarus also signed agreements to strengthen cooperation on electronic warfare and technical support for regionally-based troops.

Toward Ever-Closer Union, But How Far?

¶4. (C) According to Nikita Matkovskiy, Head of the MFA Belarus Desk, Russia's main goal is maintaining stability in Belarus. The MFA sees military cooperation, if not actual discussion of a union treaty, as an essential tool. According to the Director of the World Security Institute Ivan Safranchuk, however, military integration remains under-resourced, which he attributed to the complicated Putin-Lukashenko relationship. While Matkovskiy called Belarus Russia's closest strategic ally (although objecting to labeling Belarus "Russia's "friend") and stressed there are no major political-military disagreements between the two countries, there are no Russian advisors working in the Belarusian MOD (nor vice versa).

¶5. (C) The most prominent area of Russo-Belarusian political military cooperation is the integrated air defense system (IADS) in the western region of the air defense command of the CIS Unified Air Defense System (UADS). IADS, which presently deploys four battalions of aging S-300PMU (SA-10B) surface-to-air missile systems is designed to protect Russia and Belarus from NATO attack. Experts told us that, while Russia and Belarus share data, the two countries operated their systems independently, and Belarus could launch its S-300PMU missiles without Russian consent. Russia completed delivery of the system to Belarus in November 2006, with Belarus deploying its S-300PMUs near Brest and Grodno, near

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the Polish border.

Arms Sales

¶6. (C) Figures for arms sales to Belarus are difficult to come by, and out of the USD 6.7 billion Russia earned in arms sales in 2006, Belarus appears to have accounted for only USD 5 million (ref A), which was spent putting the finishing touches on the S-300 air defense system. (Note: Belarus produces many tanks, armored personnel carriers, and small arms in factories it inherited from the Soviet Union. Russia also provides free weapons to Belarus in an attempt to strengthen its ally.) Russia not only sells equipment to Belarus, but also provides upgrades on weapons previously sold to Belarus. The experts agree that Belarus, unlike other customers of Russian arms, buys equipment straight off the shelf from Russia and does not ask for the products to be specially modified. As a member of the CSTO, Belarus purchases weapons from the GOR at domestic Russian prices, which experts told us can sometimes be higher than the prices Russia charges when selling on the world market. Belarus is currently seeking to purchase two battalions of advanced S-400 "Triumf" (SA-21) SAMs by 2010, though Russia indicated last summer that it does not intend to export S-400 missiles in the near future. Belarus will also replace its current inventory of "Tochka" (SS-21) short range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) with the "Iskander-E" (SS-26) SRBM systems over the coming decade, to be procured from Russia within the CSTO framework.

¶7. (C) Russian officials told us that the GOR maintained an export control regime for all the weapons it sells to Belarus. The experts, however, doubted its efficiency. Neither our MFA interlocutors nor the experts could provide details about how Russia ensures that weapons sold to Belarus do not end up going to other parties. They stressed that all contracts signed with Belarus stipulate that the GOB may not resell weapons to other countries without GOR permission.

CSTO Cooperation Limited

¶8. (C) Because Belarus's constitution forbids its military from participating in military actions outside of Belarus, Russo-Belarusian joint military actions are limited. Belarus, for example, does not participate in the CSTO's Collective Rapid Deployment Forces, established on April 1, ¶2001. As early as August 1998 Belarus declared it would not send troops to Central Asia, in the event that unrest in Afghanistan spilled over into other CSTO member states. Belarus does, however, participate in the CSTO's Operation Channel drug interdiction campaign (ref B) and hosted CSTO exercises in 2006 and 2007.

Comment: Medvedev and the Future

¶9. (C) We do not expect the inauguration of Medvedev to herald major changes in Russo-Belarusian political-military cooperation. While Medvedev will bring his own style to the partnership, irritation with Lukashenko is likely to continue, contributing to a continued--but cool--strategic partnership.
RUSSELL